

### **BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Martha Akana Keli'ia'a**

Martha Keli'ia'a was born in 1926 in Kanāueue, Kona, Hawai'i. Her father, Ng Chin Akana, of Hawaiian-Chinese extraction, was from Maui; her mother, Tamar Kamala Aona Akana, also Hawaiian-Chinese, was from Hōnaunau, South Kona. Keli'ia'a was the seventh of nine children.

The siblings grew up living and working in the three stores the family owned, in Kanāueue, Captain Cook, and Hōnaunau. In addition to the general stores, the family owned coffee land in Kanāueue, where Keli'ia'a and her siblings worked. Eventually, the family gave up the Captain Cook and Hōnaunau stores to concentrate on the main Akana Store.

Keli'ia'a attended Hōnaunau and Konawaena schools, graduating from Konawaena in 1943. In 1947, she began her career as a beautician. The oral history interview was conducted in her shop, adjoining her home.

She and her husband, Daniel Keli'ia'a, a Honolulu native and former policeman, raised four children.

Tape No. 35-12-1-00

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Martha Akana Keli'ia'a (MK)

Kanāueue, Kona, Hawai'i

June 26, 2000

BY: Nancy Piianaia (NP)

NP: [Today is] June 26, [2000] and I am in Kona, actually in Kanāueue, interviewing Mrs. Martha Keli'ia'a, who is the daughter of shopkeepers who formerly owned the Aona Store.

MK: Akana Store.

NP: Akana Store, yes, thank you. And thank you, Martha, for agreeing to take time to be interviewed. I know you are really, really busy with your beauty salon and with your nine grandchildren, so I really appreciate this time.

Perhaps we can start out by you just giving me some basic biographical information, where you were born and when.

MK: Okay. I was born right here in Kanāueue. I was born [in] 1926.

NP: And do you know if you were born in a hospital or born at home?

MK: I'm not sure whether it was in a hospital or not. We did have the old Kona Hospital, but I'm not sure. I was just told that I was born in Kanāueue.

NP: And just for our information, because people can't see where we are, we're almost exactly across the street from your family's store, actually, which is across the street from the road that goes up to the Kona Hospital.

Could you tell me who your parents were, and if you know who their parents were, and perhaps where they were born also?

MK: Well, my father said he was born in Maui, and—you wanted the name?

NP: Yes.

MK: His name is Ng Chin Akana. That's all I know about my dad. He said he was of Chinese-Hawaiian extraction. My mother's name is Tamar Kamala Akana. Her maiden name was Aona. Her mother's name was Malia Aona. That's all I know about her, really.

NP: Do you know where she was born?

MK: I know that they lived in Keālia, Kona. I don't know where she was born. But during those days, you know, like my sisters-in-law had children at home. So I might have been born at home, too, I'm not too sure, and not in a hospital.

NP: Do you know how your parents met?

MK: No, I really don't know.

NP: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

MK: I know of five brothers, but I heard I had one brother that was supposedly older than me, and he died as an infant. And I had two sisters, with me, three. So there were actually nine of us.

NP: As you grew up, you lived in the store?

MK: Yes, we lived in the store, and we also had a place down at Hōnaunau, where the Kamehameha Schools now has [a campus]. I think my dad leased that place from Bishop Estate, so we lived there quite a lot. In fact, my father had a store there, so part of the time we spent there, and my mother sort of ran the store, selling all kinds of staples, and even ice cream and things like that. We lived there during the summers mostly. Then when it was school time we came up *mauka* to live.

NP: So actually, he was running two stores at the same time.

MK: Mm hmm [yes].

NP: Wow. Was he a man of great energy?

MK: He was. He was. The Chinese, I guess, is what really was in him. So he was always into something. He also had another store down in Captain Cook, where he used to service the farmers with groceries and staples. And then they would repay him with coffee at the end of the coffee season. So he lived in Captain Cook for a while, too. So he lived in Captain Cook, and we lived at Hōnaunau, and then we lived here, too.

NP: So would he go to Captain Cook when you were living up here?

MK: Yes. And he lived in Captain Cook during the week, and worked on his farm and the store, and he would come home during the weekends. And then my mother would run the store here.

NP: As well as having nine children.

MK: Yes. But this was kind of in the later years. I understand—well, this was before my time—my dad first had a movie theater business. He did movies with films, and he also used to have live performances. I heard them talking about how he would have a bear come over one time, and the audience would go up and kind of wrestle with him.

NP: Do you think this was before you were born?

MK: Oh, yes.

NP: So this was very early. You're not that old, but . . .

MK: No, no.

(Laughter)

MK: I think the movie [business] was the first thing he did, I think, recollecting whatever I heard. After that he had a coffee mill, too, right there at the store, after the theater thing. I remember he had this big machinery, and he used to grind coffee. Cherry coffee and parchment coffee. I remember as a child we used to sort coffee. You know, we'd be all at this long table sorting out all the bad coffee from the good ones. I remember doing that.

NP: Do you think this might have been coffee that he received in barter from customers?

MK: Oh yes, yes. Part of it. He also had a coffee land, too, here right below the store. That's kind of a three-acre property there, and the store was in the front and coffee in the back.

NP: Did you have to pick coffee?

MK: Oh yes, definitely! We picked coffee and hated it! (NP chuckles.) And with all of that we were still poor, we considered ourselves. I remember before going down to pick coffee we'll put sugar in wax paper, and for lunch we'd sit under the avocado trees and pick up the fallen ripe avocados and peel it, and dip it into the sugar, and have that for lunch.

NP: That was your lunch.

- MK: Mm-□Nhmm [yes]. It was good, though. We enjoyed it. It was really good. And we used to climb on the mango tree and have that for dessert (chuckles). And guavas. You know, those are the kind of things we had and enjoyed.
- NP: I'm still amazed at the number of businesses that your family was involved in.
- MK: I know. They were hard workers.
- NP: Your mother, you said, ran the stores.
- MK: Yes. Then eventually he [father] was busy doing all these other things like the coffee, I told you, at Captain Cook he had a store there, and the coffee farm. So my mother sort of took care of the store. I remember we sold a lot of groceries at one time, and gradually my mother changed it into what she called a Hawaiian curio shop, where she had *lau hala* things. The name of the store was Hawaiian Arts.
- NP: This was the one in Hōnaunau?
- MK: No, right here.
- NP: Oh, right here, okay.
- MK: They finally gave up Hōnaunau, and then they concentrated up here.
- NP: And what about Captain Cook? They stayed with that?
- MK: Yes, my father stayed with that, and my mother ran the Hawaiian Arts store. The tourists used to stop all the time. You know, that was a tourist stop. She sold all kinds of *lau hala* things. She wove a lot, and we did too, as children. She taught us to weave and we wove. So we'd go to school in the morning, and we'd come home and we'd have to weave all sorts of things: mats, coasters, and all different things. She'd sell it right there at the shop. And she did a lot of weaving herself.
- NP: Did she do pretty well?
- MK: I guess she did. And she did all kinds, too. I mean, I remember she used to even sell ice cakes. You know, she'd make ice cakes in the refrigerator with Kool-Aid, and she'd sell them. All the kids would stop after school and buy ice cakes from her.
- NP: How would she make the ice cakes?
- MK: You know in the ice cube things that you use in the refrigerator.
- NP: Would it be the kind that you put a stick in it? Like a Popsicle?

MK: No, no, she just made the cubes, and then when they came to buy she would put it in little paper bowls and sell them for—I don't know how many—but for a nickel for a few of them.

NP: She was very resourceful, wasn't she?

MK: Yes, she was.

NP: How would you describe your mother?

MK: Very nice lady, very soft woman, very caring. She took care of all of us and did her thing, you know. Yes, she was very nice. Sweet person.

NP: Going back to the *lau hala*, did you gather the *lau hala* yourself?

MK: She did. She did a lot of it herself. And we helped her. You know, because the preparation of the *lau hala* was hard. But she had some help. But she did it mostly herself.

NP: Can you describe what the store and your home was like when you were growing up? Like how many rooms did you have, and what were the sleeping arrangements?

MK: We had several rooms upstairs, and a nice big living room. I remember there weren't that many of us there by that time. My older sister and my brothers were all out. I think it was just my sister Rose and I that I can remember. My brothers were all out.

NP: What were they doing?

MK: I remember one was at the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camp somewhere, and one was in the [military] service. And my brother Albert, the oldest brother, was a schoolteacher, and the others were in Honolulu. Couple of them are with the post office. That's about all I can remember about them. Because they were much older than we were. Rose and I were the last two in the family of nine . . .

NP: The two babies, last ones.

MK: Yes. So I don't remember too much about them because they were all away. Hester, I remember, because she lived here. So when she had her baby she'd come back and stay with us and had one of the rooms. But it seems like we were pretty comfortable.

NP: So you had a living room upstairs above the store.

MK: And three bedrooms.

NP: And each of you had your own bedroom?

MK: No, my sister and I shared, and my father and mother had one room, and I remember one brother and his wife had another room, but they weren't there that long.

NP: And then downstairs?

MK: Downstairs was the kitchen, we had a kitchen there and a working area where my mother did her *lau hala*. That was the last thing, you know, her *lau hala* weaving. And the store was in the front part.

NP: Okay. Was the kitchen a typical—was it large?

MK: Yes, it was a large kitchen. In fact, just about as large as this whole kitchen.

NP: Do you think they had remodeled and made it larger as time went by?

MK: No, I think, as far as I can remember, it was always the same.

NP: And this is the same area where they had a movie theater at one time?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes].

NP: So must have been a pretty good-sized . . .

MK: Well, I think when they had a movie theater, I think it was farther back. And after the movie theater, I think the house was cut little bit through so it wasn't quite so large.

NP: Let's backtrack a little bit and have you talk about growing up, some of your earliest memories, what it was like to live there, early childhood, what were some of the memories you have?

MK: Well, I know we worked hard. We picked coffee as I told you, and then we did weaving. When we came home from school we always had to do something. If it's not picking coffee, it's with the *lau hala*. But we had a good life. We had some animals; we took care of them, like chickens and pigs, and stuff like that, and so we had to do that.

NP: You would then use them for food?

MK: Oh yes, my father would kill a chicken every so often.

NP: Did you learn how to do that also?

MK: Not really (chuckles). I remember plucking them, but not too much. My father did all the cooking. I think we were pretty well fed because my father was a very good cook. We

ate well. That I know, we ate well. Mostly Chinese food. My father would prepare these different Chinese foods. And even if he went to get something from the store from the can, like corned beef or something like that, my father was such a good cook that it was delicious. It was cooked just right, it was not overdone. It was just perfect.

NP: How would he cook the corned beef?

MK: Kind of like omelet style with onions and some eggs in it. But what I'm saying is his cooking was just perfect. Whatever he cooked was really good. I'm really sorry that we always tried to run away when he was cooking (NP chuckles) because we didn't want to have to crack some of the nuts that he used in his cooking and peel all the vegetables and things like that.

NP: What kind of nuts would he use?

MK: Well, you know Chinese use something—I don't know what you call them, but I remember there were little nuts that he would use. Kind of looked like almonds but they were not almonds.

NP: So he did some pretty . . .

MK: Oh, he did most of the cooking. My mother did some cooking, too, and she was a good cook, too, but he did most of it, and he did it well. And when it was time to eat, the store had to be closed. And everybody had to sit and eat. But we had a strict life, though. When we sat at the table, nobody talked (chuckles). And you had to sit properly. If sometimes by mistake we'd put our hands up, we would get slapped. So sitting at the table, sometimes you couldn't even giggle. I remember pinching myself because there were times that you want to giggle, and I just couldn't do that, so I'd pinch myself to hurt myself so that I wouldn't even giggle.

NP: Probably couldn't look at your sister, either.

MK: We don't even want to look at each other. He was rather strict. But it was all right. When it's time to eat, you eat, and you eat well. And you excuse yourself and leave when it's over, but that was it. No conversation at all. But he'd sit at the table and when he needed more rice he'd hand the person next to him the bowl, and we'd have to go and scoop rice for him.

NP: And would your mom make Hawaiian food?

MK: Yes, she did.

NP: And he liked Hawaiian food, also?



MK: Yes, uh-huh. And you know, my father spoke—and my mother—spoke Hawaiian fluently. So when they didn't want us to hear what they were saying they would speak in Hawaiian. Of course, my father spoke Chinese, but nobody else spoke it. He only spoke it when he met his friends.

NP: Did he have Chinese customers sometimes?

MK: Yes. Those days there were lot of Chinese around here, so he had lot of Chinese friends. And on Sundays he used to go and visit. He had a brother living in Kalaoa side, I remember he'd go and visit him. He'd go down to Kailua, had lot of Chinese people living right along the shoreline. He'd go down there and visit his Chinese friends and spend time with them.

NP: Did you keep in touch with your father's brother and that side of the family?

MK: I did.

NP: Are they still here in Kona?

MK: Well, his children are. He only had three children. Yeah, I kept in touch with him until the very end. I used to go and visit him a lot.

NP: Be interesting to see if they knew anything about—I imagine they both came from Maui, and if they could kind of go back in years.

MK: But my uncle didn't want to talk about the past. I tried to ask him, I tried to get some information from him, but he always said, "What for? They're all gone. Forget about it," he'd say.

NP: So that was that.

MK: That was that.

NP: I didn't ask you, but where did you go to school?

MK: I first started at Hōnaunau [School] because were living down there, at Hōnaunau. Probably only like for first grade I was there. Then I went up to Konawaena [High School].

NP: And were you able to go through all the grades?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes], I graduated from Konawaena. And then, my mother had this curio shop so all kinds of people came. And these people from the beauty school came one day to shop, and she asked them if I could go to beauty school. Without my knowledge

she made all the arrangements for me to go to beauty school, and paid for my tuition and said, "You're going to go to the beauty school when you graduate from high school." I was just about graduating at that particular time. And I didn't want to go. (Chuckles) Because I had no idea, never thought about being a beautician, you know. But she says, "But you're going to go. If you want to go to Honolulu you're going to have to go to beauty school." And I wanted to go to Honolulu. I just wanted to get away from Kona. So I said, "Well, my mother is such a nice person, I'm sure when I get to Honolulu I'm going to look for something else. I'm not going to go to beauty school." So she sent me to Honolulu, and I right away found another job. Oh yeah, prior to that, as soon as I graduated from school, I worked for the selective service. You know, the draft board?

NP: In Kona?

MK: Yes, down in Kailua at the draft board. I worked there for about one year.

NP: So that would have been what year? You were born in 1926.

MK: I graduated in 1943.

NP: Oh, during the war.

MK: Yes, during the wartime. Because I remember sending a lot of boys out from Kona. So when I got to Honolulu I was able to get a job, I worked right away for the Inter-island Steam Navigation Company and got this good job. I wrote home and told my mother that I was going to work as a clerk, I guess it was, at the time. I was telling her I had my own desk and I was really happy about it. She says, "If you want to work for somebody, you come home and you work for me and I'll pay you, and I'll get you a desk. But otherwise, if you want to stay in Honolulu you're going to go to the beauty school."

So I started on April 1, [1946]. There was that tsunami in Hilo [that day]. I started on that day at this steam navigation company [in Honolulu]. And the 25th was my day to go to the beauty school, so I quit [the navigation company] (chuckles) because I didn't want to come home. I quit and I went to the beauty school. And you know what? That's why I always say till today, mothers know best. Because from day one at beauty school, I enjoyed it. I loved it.

I went through the whole thing, and I worked a year. During that time my mother passed away [in 1947], while I was at beauty school. So I came back because my mother said that after I went through beauty school she wanted me to come back, and that she would build me a shop, and that she'd give me this property here. So eventually I came back. And I'm really thankful for my mom because I just loved it. I had no problem after I graduated from beauty school. I worked for Elizabeth Arden in Honolulu, at the

Moana Hotel, and I did well, I came back here. And you know, I never had a slow day all through my years of work.

NP: You've been doing this here since 1948?

MK: No, '47, actually, because I got married in '48.

NP: More than fifty years. That's incredible.

MK: I know. And I'm still working. I work four days a week now. Because I love people. I love being with people, and I just can't see quitting. I enjoy people.

NP: And they obviously enjoy you if they keep coming back.

MK: Oh yes. My customers are my friends. We're all friends. I just enjoy my work. I love it.

NP: So your mom passed away while you were still in school?

MK: While I was still in school.

NP: So how did this all come about that you got this property and you were able to start this?

MK: When my mother passed away, we came home, naturally, for her funeral. Then when I went back, my dad said, "I want you to come back. I want to give you this property because this is what your mom wanted you to have." So I came back and he turned this property over to me. And then I came back and I worked. I had a beauty shop down at that old store down there, the Akana Store.

NP: Oh okay. That's where you started.

MK: I started there. I had a room made right on the porch. I worked there for I don't know how many years, but for several years I worked there until I moved here and I built this house, oh, I don't know how long ago it was. Probably 1951, I think it was. Then I had a shop here.

NP: Had you met your husband yet?

MK: Yes, I met him when I was in Honolulu. And then when I came back he wanted me to come back there [Honolulu] and marry him and stay there. My sister Hester was like a mother to me then because I didn't have a mother. And she said, "No, you don't go back. You stay back and you work at least one year. Then you'll know whether you're really meant for each other." So I listened to her. Those days, we listened, right?

(Laughter)

NP: Those were the good old days.

MK: We listened to our elders, right? And so I did that. I stayed back and I worked for one year. And then he moved over to Kona because I didn't want to go back to Honolulu then, you know. So he moved over.

NP: And just for the record, his name is Daniel Keli'ia'a, and he was born and brought up in Honolulu?

MK: Mm-hmm, yes.

NP: And was he a policeman before?

MK: No, he came back here and he lived in Hilo and became a policeman in Hilo. Then we got married. Then they transferred him to Kona, because I was living in Kona.

NP: He's such a lucky man, yeah?

(Laughter)

MK: I don't know.

NP: Yes, I'm sure. And then you built your house here after you folks got married.

MK: Mm-hmm [yes]. We lived down at the old house for a while.

NP: At the store?

MK: Mm-hmm [yes]. I think we got married in '49. (Chuckles) Yeah, we did get married in '49. And I think we built this house in '51.

NP: And how long did the store last?

MK: Chee, I can't remember that. I really can't remember that.

NP: You said your mom passed away . . .

MK: Yeah, she passed away while I was in school.

NP: And was your father still working then?

MK: He was, uh-huh. And I can't remember how long after that he lived. But I don't think he lived too long after that.

- NP: Did he live by himself there? Or did you folks . . .
- MK: We were living there with him. And just before we moved here he passed away. Because he was going to come and live with me.
- NP: Okay. So he passed away then in 1951?
- MK: I'm not too sure. I can look it up. [MK's father passed away November 26, 1952.]
- NP: Yeah, I'll get that information later. And then after he passed away, what happened to that property?
- MK: I think we just closed it up. I really can't remember. 'Cause I had moved here. . . . Oh, no, no. My sister Rose lived there for a while but there was no business. She just kind of lived in the back. She was married so she lived there for several years.
- NP: And did they keep the coffee going in the back?
- MK: No. And then when she moved out, then my older sister Hester's son took over the place.
- NP: And he made it---what kind of a store was it then?
- MK: Well, he had somebody renting it, you know, clothing store and odds-and-ends. And then he sort of fixed the back up and made it into living quarters, apartments like, studio apartments.
- NP: But your parents were no longer there so it wasn't the same kind of place it had been before.
- MK: No.
- NP: Okay. Let's go back again because this [interview] is really about the store. Let's see if we can go back as early as you can remember and talk about—maybe we should talk about the Akana Store here, and if you can talk about Hōnaunau. And try to think about the kinds of things that were sold in both the stores.
- MK: Okay.
- NP: I don't know whether it would be easier to start with the Akana Store or Hōnaunau.
- MK: Maybe Akana Store.
- NP: This would be before you started doing the handicrafts, the *lau hala*, when it was a general store, pretty much.

MK: General store.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

NP: Okay. In the Akana Store, what kind of products would you find?

MK: Well, I remember we had all kinds of groceries, canned goods and things like that, rice. And on one side of the store my mother had like showcases with. . . .

NP: Were these glass showcases?

MK: Yes, glass showcases with different things. Can't remember exactly what it was, but.

NP: Did she have dry goods? Did she have clothes?

MK: Yes, she had clothes, that's right. She had clothes, too, and shoes, things like that.

NP: Cloth? Bolts of cloth?

MK: No, she didn't have cloth. I'm trying to think. She had several showcases, and there were things in it, but I can't even remember what they were, really. I guess I was so young and didn't pay much attention to those things.

NP: Were there things in the store that you really liked?

MK: Well, like *crack seed*. I can remember you could buy a whole big sack of *crack seed* for five cents.

NP: Wow. Do you know where the *crack seed* came from?

MK: Must be from China. But seeds, a lot of seeds they had. Chinese seeds as a whole.

NP: Can you name, any in your memory, of what kinds of *crack seed*?

MK: Well, I remember the original *crack seed*, the wet one, and all the other little seeds like the football and the plums, that kind of things. Oh, and the cherry seeds, things like that.

NP: And were they all in plastic or were they in big jars?

MK: No, they were in big jars, and then you just scoop it into these little packages.

NP: And were you allowed to have whenever you wanted?

MK: No, not whenever we wanted to, but we had it. I remember that we used to just chew on the package, too, after it was all over.

NP: Oh, it sounds so good!

(Laughter)

MK: That's about all I can remember what they had in the store.

NP: And did they have fishing tackle, supplies?

MK: I don't remember that. Might have, but I don't remember that.

NP: What about food items?

MK: Oh, the groceries. I don't remember *poi*, but they did have pastry, because we had a whole case where we kept the pastries enclosed. The bakery used to come every day and deliver bread and . . .

NP: You remember what bakery that was?

MK: Kona Bakery.

NP: Kona Bakery.

MK: Pastries, doughnuts, and things like that.

NP: And once again, were you allowed to have if you wanted?

MK: We weren't free to have so many things, but we did have.

NP: And who would you ask if you wanted?

MK: My mother, of course.

(Laughter)

NP: What about canned goods? You mentioned you had corned beef.

MK: We had canned crab, I remember that. All kinds, I think. I can't remember exactly what, but. It's just that I remember that my dad hardly ever used canned food. Hardly. But when he did, it was always good.

NP: Did you have salt salmon barrels?

MK: No, we didn't have those things. We weren't a big store, I don't think. We didn't consider it a big general store. It was kind of a small store.

NP: You had rice.

MK: Yes.

NP: Okay. And the rice, did you measure it out?

MK: No, no. Crackers. I remember crackers we had in cans that we kind of measured it out and packaged it.

NP: Were there any fresh vegetables?

MK: No, we didn't have fresh food. No meat products, or anything like that.

NP: What about kerosene?

MK: Yes, kerosene.

NP: You didn't sell gasoline, did you?

MK: No, just kerosene.

NP: And what about liquor? Did you have liquor?

MK: No, no liquor.

NP: Did your dad ever talk about having that and deciding not to?

MK: No. Well, we were so young then, so he didn't discuss anything with us, really.

NP: Okay. Do you remember the hours of the store?

MK: No. I don't remember. But I remember it was open when the school kids were walking to school.

NP: So that would have been about. . . .

MK: Seven, seven-thirty [A.M.], about that time. And as I said, every time we ate, it was closed for about half an hour or so, which would be lunchtime and dinnertime, and then he'd reopen again. So he would work maybe until about eight o'clock.

NP: That's a long day. Was it seven days a week?

MK: Yes it was.

NP: So what would you do for—if the store was open all the time it must have been difficult for your family to go off on outings where you'd do things together.



MK: We really didn't do much. Like nowadays we take the kids to the beach or anything like that. We never did that. The only time we really went to the beach was when we lived down at Hōnaunau. You know, that's the only time I remember we were able to go swimming all the time. But we never went out as a family. And when we played it was just kind of among ourselves. And mostly we'd play in the coffee land, which was fun. It was nice.

NP: What would you play?

MK: Oh, just kind of climbing in the trees and stuff like that. But you know, I remember because when we were little girls, we wanted to wear high-heeled shoes and stuff like that; we never had it, of course. I remember, you know the roads used to have tar, you know that tar that kind of melted?

NP: Soft.

MK: Yeah, soft. And we'd kind of rub it on our heels. We'd rub our heel into the soft stuff and put a rock under it, stick a rock under it so we'd have high heels.

(Laughter)

NP: That's great.

MK: And then cleaning up was always a chore after that. I remember doing things like that. I don't think we really played a lot, because we had to work. And like I said, we had the coffee to pick, we had coffee to sort when we had the coffee mill, and then we had *lau hala* to weave. And then when we were going to school we had homework to do, and then it was time to go to bed.

NP: How was school? Was it easy or difficult? What are your memories of school?

MK: Well, it didn't seem like it was difficult, but I don't think it was too easy. It was okay.

NP: Did you have friends in school even though you didn't have time to play?

MK: We had friends at school. But you know those days, it was a very racial thing. You know, the Japanese kids would be by themselves, the Hawaiian kids would be there by themselves. We hardly had any *haole* kids around, but mostly it was Japanese, Filipino and Hawaiian kids. So we were not really friendly with everybody, it seems, because they wouldn't—especially the Japanese kids, they wouldn't associate with us.

NP: So what group would you be with?

- MK: The Hawaiian group and the Filipinos. But I seem to have been able to mix. I had a few Japanese friends, too.
- NP: There weren't that many Chinese students?
- MK: No, hardly. There were some, but not very many.
- NP: Different from now, I guess.
- MK: Oh yeah. Now it's totally different. Now I have more Japanese friends than I have anything else, you know. (Chuckles)
- NP: Did your family---I know that the store was open almost all the time. Did it ever close on holidays? Do you remember?
- MK: I don't remember. I don't think so. We might have closed sometimes, but not any special time, I don't think.
- NP: The Japanese stores would usually close on New Year's for a day or two.
- MK: That's right. I don't know if we did or not, come to think of it.
- NP: Did you celebrate any Chinese holidays?
- MK: Oh yes. We celebrated it, especially Chinese New Year's.
- NP: What would you do?
- MK: Fireworks. And eat. My dad used to make really good food. And then he'd invite my brothers—my brother. I had only one brother then, and my sister, of course, here in Kona. So they'd come up to eat with us.
- NP: And what would he make for New Year's food?
- MK: Oh, I don't know. All kinds of Chinese food using mostly chicken and pork. But good food. It's not the kind of food you can get at Chinese restaurants. It was different.
- NP: I wonder how he learned to cook like that.
- MK: I don't know. He was just good at it. Really good.
- NP: Would he make *jai* at New Year's?
- MK: Uh-huh [yes].

NP: That's a skill.

MK: But in those days, I didn't even know it was *jai*, you know, until recently. I know he made that. He used a lot of oysters, and that was delicious. And when my father cooks he counts everything, you know. Maybe he counts two for each person, or one for each person, I don't know. But I know he's always counting. He counts the nuts, he counts the oysters, he counts everything.

NP: So he wouldn't waste.

MK: Probably. The tofu, and things like that.

NP: Did he sell tofu also in the store?

MK: No.

NP: Where would you go to get things like tofu and the other ingredients?

MK: Well, you know, people used to come around selling tofu. And he'd go to the meat market to buy meat and things like that. And chicken, we had our own chicken. My father, every so often he'd go to Honolulu, and he'd come back with a whole bunch of Chinese food. I don't mean fresh food, but like dried lily and the nuts that I talk about, and the fungus thing, all kinds of dried things.

NP: And that was for you folks. That wasn't for the store.

MK: No, no. For us. So we had a whole pantry full of Chinese foodstuff, dried kind. So when he cooked, he had all of these things. It was a lot of soaking it up, and cleaning it up, and things like that. And, of course, he'd get his fresh vegetable from the market. No, in fact, we had somebody that came that would sell fresh food.

NP: He would come by in a . . .

MK: On a wagon. This wagon would come selling fish, vegetables and fruits. That's how he . . .

NP: That's how he would get it. You don't remember the name of the person?

MK: Well, I remember Hōnaunau market, Kiriara Store used to come around selling vegetables, and things like that.

NP: Did you folks have a car?

MK: Yes.

NP: I mean, maybe it seems obvious . . .

MK: I'm trying to think way back. We had a car in the recent years, but I'm trying to think way back.

NP: I was wondering how you would get from here to Hōnaunau, and how your dad would get to Captain Cook otherwise.

MK: Yeah, we had a car. I remember going to Hōnaunau one time at night, and this cow, bull or whatever, came running into our car, and hit our car, and ran away. And then when we got home, the horn was stuck in our car in the grill in the front. But yes, we had a car. Can't remember what kind it was, but we had one.

NP: And would he make deliveries also? I know some stores used to deliver to . . .

MK: The store that he had at Captain Cook, he delivered to his farmers way up in Hōnaunau and all over. He used to have somebody deliver for him, too, but as I got older I delivered when I was like sixteen, just at the age to drive. I delivered up in the coffee land. And you know, when I think back, I was really brave. I'd have to go all the way up in the coffee lands way up to the top, and all these Filipino people would be standing along the road waiting for me because I would take rice and other kinds of food that they need, delivering it to them. And carrying bags of rice into these homes.

NP: Were they big bags?

MK: Yeah, the 100-pound.

NP: Hundred pounds, oh my gosh.

MK: I don't know how I did it.

NP: And you're a small person.

MK: But I did it. The Filipinos were really nice. They would come out by the road and pick up their groceries. But the Japanese people, I remember having to take it into their house.

NP: Let's stop and we'll turn this tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

- NP: Now, we were talking about the Captain Cook store, and you making deliveries. Can you kind of tell me as well as you can remember, where the Captain Cook store was?
- MK: Okay, it's coming from . . .
- NP: From here.
- MK: From here, you have to pass Captain Cook, pass Sure Save market, and pass Noguchi coffee mill, and you had to turn to the right. It was off a side road. It wasn't on the main road; it was a side road. You turn down there, and it was just this one store. There were a lot of—a few homes, rather, not a lot, a few homes down in there. It was really coffee land area. And the store was right there. If you went further up you'd come up by Machado Store.
- NP: Okay, that's pinpointing it well enough. And it was his land that he had bought?
- MK: No, it's leased land, I think it was.
- NP: Oh, leased land, okay. And in order to make the deliveries, did people call in what they wanted? You know how the whole system worked?
- MK: I remember some of them called, but a lot of them would just kind of come to the store and make an order, or else they probably had a monthly kind of order thing.
- NP: So a set order like for rice every month or something like that.
- MK: Yeah, set.
- NP: And was it the same kind of store as the Akana Store here?
- MK: No, it wasn't. It was a smaller store and it was mostly groceries. Not fresh foods, but groceries, canned goods and staples: rice and sugar, things like that.
- NP: Did you have shoyu also?
- MK: Shoyu, yes.
- NP: Did you folks have miso also?
- MK: No, I don't remember miso those days, and I don't think we sold it if they had it. They must have had it, but I don't remember selling it.
- NP: So he didn't carry bakery goods and things that were perishable.
- MK: Probably bread, but not fresh pastries or anything like that. Just bread.

NP: And you were the delivery girl.

MK: Yeah, I was the delivery girl from age sixteen. I delivered all the way up into the coffee lands.

NP: Amazing.

MK: Amazing is right.

NP: How did you learn how to drive?

MK: A friend of mine taught my sister Rose and I how to drive together.

NP: When you were about sixteen or much younger?

MK: About fifteen, I think, I started to drive—no, I take that back. I was driving earlier, I think maybe like fourteen. And the sheriff who lived close to us right here was Sheriff Ushiroda. He lived close to my home and he saw me driving. He says, “Hey girl, you better come and get a license, ‘cause I see you driving.” So when I was of age, fifteen, I went for my license.

NP: Was a different kind of police then, wasn’t it, where they’d stop you and tell you.

MK: Oh yes, they were very lenient. And he was my neighbor; we were friends. So he was nice. (Chuckles)

NP: Tell me about Hōnaunau. What was that store like, and what was it like to live down there?

MK: Well, it was fun because we got to go swimming all the time, swimming naked.

NP: Oh no!

(Laughter)

MK: Oh yes, because that’s the only way. Just go to the beach, take off all of our clothes, put it on the stone wall, and we were in the water. My relatives that came from Honolulu said when they wanted to look for us, they’d just go along the stone wall and look for our clothes, and then they knew where we were. But it was fun living there.

I don’t remember too much—we had a lot of canned goods, I remember. But all I can remember is that we sold a lot of ice cream. And my mother made the ice cream.

NP: She made the ice cream?

MK: Yes.

NP: Oh, tell me about that. What was that like?

MK: Well, I don't know too much. All I know is she had this sort of round thing and she'd put salt in it, and I don't know what else, but then she would wind it up.

NP: Would you help? Did you guys help?

MK: Didn't do too much. Funny, but we didn't do too much of that kind of work. But we ate the ice cream.

NP: What kinds did she make?

MK: I only remember vanilla. I don't know if she made anything else.

NP: Did she have refrigeration? She must have.

MK: Yes.

NP: To keep it in freezer someplace.

MK: No, no freezer. I think she just makes her ice cream and just sells it like that. Because we didn't have a freezer, come to think of it. And we had a refrigerator with the ice [i.e., icebox], blocks of ice.

NP: So that ice cream would just last for an hour or so as it got. . . .

MK: She must have made it in small quantities. I don't remember, but probably in the days when there were lot of people around, I don't know. Because she didn't make it every day.

NP: Now, what kind of people lived down there that came to the store? Were they different from the people who were, say up . . .

MK: *Mauka*? Yes. They were mostly Hawaiians. Hawaiian people, I would say. And there were quite a few people. And lot of people would just come down for the day. So that's when---she probably made ice cream on Sundays or something like that when there were a lot of people, you know.

NP: So the products might have been different because there were people stopping through who needed snacks or things like that?

MK: Yes, like candies and things like that. I don't remember too much about chips. I don't know if we had chips during those days. But candies, I know we had a lot of that. That's right, we sold a lot of candies, both places.

NP: Did you have *crack seed* down there, also?

MK: Yes.

NP: And your days down there, would you work in the store part of the day, or did you mostly . . .

MK: I don't think so. I think we were too young then. Because I remember going to school as a first-grader. So I don't think we did much work, except play. We loved being down there because it was play.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

NP: Okay. So we were talking a little bit about Hōnaunau. Could you describe what the store was like, and whether you lived there, whether it was your home?

MK: The store was like a cottage. It had a porch and a big living room area, which became the store area. And then we had one great big room where everybody slept in several beds, and one kitchen. And that was it. But it was nice. We loved it.

NP: Was it right down by the water?

MK: Right by the water. The water was right in front of it.

NP: Is it still there now?

MK: It's still there. That's Bishop Estate [land] and Kamehameha [School] has a preschool there.

NP: Is there a name for that area or the street?

MK: I don't know.

NP: What's the building used for now? Is it still . . .

MK: Still there and it's still a Kamehameha preschool.

NP: Preschool. Oh, that's neat.



- MK: It's nice now. They really fixed it up and it's nice. My brother lived there after my mother and father gave up the store. My older brother Albert lived there. That was his home there until he passed away.
- NP: And you used to go back there to visit him?
- MK: Yeah, once in a while. My brother was a loner. He didn't care for (chuckles) visitors so we hardly ever went.
- NP: How many years you think you went down there in the summer?
- MK: Let's see. Chee, I really don't remember. The last I remember was going to school there. I went to school there only as a first-grader. So I don't know, I don't remember. After that I think we moved up here. And they gave up the place down there, and my brother took over.
- NP: Oh, 'cause he was old enough.
- MK: Oh yeah. He was a schoolteacher.
- NP: Oh okay. Was he a schoolteacher here?
- MK: At Hōnaunau.
- NP: Hōnaunau. How wonderful for him to be down there.
- MK: Yes. It was very nice.
- NP: So when you did go down there when you were real young, you would probably—I realize now how young you were, but you would probably go down right after school was *pau* then you'd spend the summer and come back in the fall? Or would you go back and forth to the store?
- MK: No, no. Like I said, we spent the summer there.
- NP: Wonderful life.
- MK: Yes, it was really nice.
- NP: Did you---of course, you were very, very young, but did your brothers and sisters help in the store? Help your mom out?
- MK: I don't remember. As I told you, many of them were gone already. So I really don't even remember being with my brothers. Only my younger sister and I. My brothers must have left much earlier when they were young.

NP: So actually, as you went to school your time was really spent at the Akana Store, living there, helping out, working the coffee field, coffee farm.

MK: Coffee mill.

NP: Coffee mill.

MK: And the *lau hala*.

NP: The *lau hala*.

MK: The *lau hala* shop.

NP: Do you remember how your parents kept records or receipts, and how that worked in the store at all?

MK: Well, my father had an accountant. His name was Mr. Wada. He was there in the office, and he did a lot of book[keeping]. So he must have done it for both my father and my mother. Because my father was into all these different businesses, too.

NP: Do you know if most of the customers were charge customers, or how the store worked when it was a general store?

MK: The Captain Cook store, I told you that they were being paid by the coffee. At the end of the coffee season they would be paying by that. But other than that, I think it was mostly by cash. Probably some charge, but I don't remember too much about that.

NP: And the *lau hala* shop was probably . . .

MK: Cash.

NP: Would be cash.

MK: Because it was mostly tourists that came. We had a whole lot of tourists that stopped by.

NP: What kind of people were they? The tourists? Do you know where they came from, or. . . .

MK: The Mainland. *Haole* tourists. Those days didn't have Japan tourists. And people from Honolulu, you know, and the other islands. But mostly *haole*, I would say.

NP: And this was before the war?

MK: Oh yes.

- NP: And there were a lot of tourists back then?
- MK: Yes. All these tour buses used to go by and stop by. That was one of their stops, my mother's Hawaiian Arts.
- NP: Were they different tourists from now? The *haoles*?
- MK: Gee, I don't remember. They all seemed nice, though.
- NP: To me, it would seem like it would take much more effort to come to Hawai'i back in those days. You had to come on a boat, didn't you? I don't know when. . . .
- MK: That's right [laughs].
- NP: It wasn't like just jumping on a plane in San Francisco and four hours later you're at the Kona airport. I must have been spectacular for them to come this far.
- MK: Well, not really. I think those days they must have had planes. Because I was a little older by then. Her curio shop was the last thing we had at that store. So I was older then. I remember my sister went to Kam[ehameha] School [in Honolulu], my sister Rose, and she had to travel on the [S.S.] *Humu'ula*. That's the [inter-island] boat. But soon after that there were planes. So I think a lot of them came by plane.
- NP: Do you have any memories of the kind of people who would supply groceries to you and supplies . . .
- MK: Yeah, American Factors. I remember American Factors and T.H. Davies, and that was about all I can remember.
- NP: What do you remember about them? Do you remember the salesmen who would come?
- MK: No, I don't remember. But I know they had a building down in Kailua. I don't know how my father—must be by phone he'd order, then they'd deliver. I remember the kerosene man, he was a really nice man. I can't remember his name now, but anyway, he was a really nice man. I can still see his face. But he used to deliver kerosene from down in Kailua somewhere. His name was Mr. [Henry] De Guiar.
- NP: Were there a lot of people who needed kerosene in those days?
- MK: Oh yes, because we cooked with kerosene stoves. So people would come buying by the gallons. They'd bring their gallons then they'd fill it up. I remember helping with that, filling up gallons of kerosene.
- NP: Would people come every week for kerosene?

- MK: Oh yes, all the time. They'd buy just about a gallon at a time, and then they used it for cooking. So they must have had to buy all the time.
- NP: What about World War II? Do you have memories of World War II and its effect on your family and stores? I mean, you were in—let me see, you would have been in high school then, I believe.
- MK: Mm-hmm, yes, I graduated in '43. And World War II was '41.
- NP: What kind of memories do you have?
- MK: Well, I remember we had to go to school carrying a gas mask. And we graduated carrying a gas mask. We had blackouts. We had to turn all our lights out at a certain time, and if we stayed up we had to blacken our windows so that the lights wouldn't shine out.
- NP: During the war, did your dad still have the Captain Cook store? 'Cause you said you were making deliveries when you were about sixteen.
- MK: Seventeen, eighteen. Yeah, I think he probably still had it. In fact, he had it until he passed away. Because he was living there, and he'd come home during the weekends. Then when he became ill he came home, and he stayed home. He didn't live too long after that. But he had that Captain Cook store yet, right.
- NP: Do you know if you had any trouble getting supplies during the war?
- MK: Oh yes, we were rationed. We could only have so much, like, rice. That's when we started to sell rice by pack, you know, by five, ten pounds because we couldn't get as much as we wanted.
- NP: And would the rice come through Amfac still?
- MK: Yes, Amfac.
- NP: I'm wondering how the system worked for a store. Would you get a certain amount?
- MK: Yes. They'd ration us maybe so many bags. Then from that we determined how much every customer should have.
- NP: Would people give ration cards for the rice?
- MK: I don't remember that.

NP: I know that these are real specific questions. What were the things that you remember were rationed that were difficult to get?

MK: Like I said, the rice and sugar. I don't know.

NP: Did you have a victory garden at school that you worked on?

MK: No, I didn't work on it.

NP: You had other things to do.

MK: But they had gardens, victory gardens. I don't even think we had one. I don't remember whether we had. We were too busy doing other things.

NP: Did you have a garden behind your house at all?

MK: I don't remember (chuckles). Probably onions and things like that, but not really a victory garden. Because it was mostly coffee.

NP: Could we talk a little bit about the customers that your parents had? I know we talked about Captain Cook and you delivered to Japanese and Filipinos who were coffee farmers. What about the Akana Store?

MK: I only remember the tourists, which were *haole* people, and some local people from Honolulu. I'm thinking about the Hawaiian Arts side, but as far as the groceries, we had the local people. The Japanese people and all the people that lived around the area. We didn't have supermarket so the neighborhood people came. So we had all different types of people.

NP: How often would someone typically shop, do you think?

MK: Well, I don't remember.

NP: Hard to say?

MK: Hard to say.

NP: Some probably came every day, and some came . . .

MK: Some came every day, I know that, but I think during those days people didn't buy like how we buy now. You know, we go and we shop, and we sometimes shop for days, weeks or so. But those days people would sort of buy day-by-day. Maybe one can of something, you know.

NP: Yeah, and they didn't have refrigeration, so.

MK: Yes, not too much.

NP: When your dad would have a pig slaughtered, like you said you raised pigs . . .

MK: Not much. We didn't have much.

NP: What would you do with the meat? I mean, you can't eat the whole pig.

MK: Well, by that time we had refrigeration. And I guess by that time we might have had freezer, I don't know.

NP: Would he salt some of it, too?

MK: Oh yes, we did a lot of that salt meat.

NP: Would you smoke meat?

MK: No, we didn't smoke. Maybe other people did, but we didn't. He was too busy doing his own thing, his coffee land and things like that.

NP: Do you think it was—your life as a child of two very busy store owners—do you think your life was different than other children's?

MK: I don't think so. Sometimes we'd talk, different people about the same age talk, and it seems that we all had about the same kind of life, you know, picking coffee and playing in the coffee land. I think the Japanese people were really hard workers. So my father would always get on our case because we slept till late, did things the way we wanted. But we worked hard, though, because I remember having to go into the—you know after he ground his coffee, and he had these big tanks where the coffee goes in, and we had to go in and kind of walk around into it to stir the coffee up, and stuff like that, then put it on this thing that shook the coffee and then went onto the coffee platform, things like that. So we worked.

NP: Did you have the *hoshidana*, too?

MK: Yes we did.

NP: Oh, you did. Wow.

MK: Mm-hmm, we had that, too. So I don't know, we had a busy life. (Chuckles)

NP: Yeah, sounds like it.

MK: Busy life, but I don't think of it as a hard life, you know. I think we had a pretty good life. But we were never rich. I think we were just normal, just middle-class.

NP: With two very hard-working parents.

(Telephone rings. Taping stops, then resumes.)

MK: My mother was such a loving person, so I think that I'm a loving person, too, because I have all these grandchildren that I really adore and love them and I have them with me. I constantly have children with me. And as I say, we worked hard, so I continue to work hard. And at my age, I am still working. I love people and I know my parents loved people, too, because they worked with them, and they were nice to all of them, and I think I learned to be the same. I really enjoy people. I believe in working hard, but not too excessively. And I enjoy it, you know. Lot of people say, "You should retire."

But I said, "I enjoy working. I don't want to retire." I know there's so much I can do if I retire. And even if I retire, I think I would like to go out and do some kind of volunteer work or something like that, just to keep me busy because that's my life. I think my parents brought me up that way. I think they were really great parents, and they really taught me to be what I am today. I don't know if I'm doing a good job, but I'm trying my best.

NP: Oh, I think you are.

MK: And even at my age, I'm helping my son with his two children. Well, I helped them since their birth, but now one is three and other one is two. And they're with me constantly.

NP: Do they live here with you, too?

MK: Part of the time. The three-year-old lives with us all the time, but—my son and his wife are divorced, so the little girl, I have her part of the time, which is a lot, like Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday.

NP: How lucky for her and for you folks. You know, instead of them having to be alone or going from baby-sitter to baby-sitter, they have you, and it must be a sense of security, which is so important.

MK: Yes. And I enjoy them. People say, "You're too old to be baby-sitting."

But I say, "But I enjoy them. I think they keep me young."

NP: I think so. How did your parents keep your family going, with your father, he seemed like he was always moving from place to place.

MK: I think it was really my mother. My father was the worker. My mother worked hard, too, but I think she was the one that kind of kept us together.

NP: Did she ever complain?

MK: My mother? Oh, I never heard her complain, really. No. I don't remember her complaining.

NP: I remember reading in the notes that Maile made, that your mother used to smoke a corn cob pipe?

MK: No, I think my grandmother.

NP: Oh, your grandmother used to.

MK: And my grandmother used to smoke [Bull] Durham. You know, now that you say that, I don't even remember if maybe my mother did it, but I don't remember. But I remember my grandmother smoked a pipe. Not my mother.

NP: Your grandmother.

MK: Uh huh. Bull Durham, but whether my grandmother did it or my mother, I'm not sure. I think it was my grandmother. I don't think my mother smoked.

NP: And you remember your grandmother? She was alive for a while?

MK: Oh yeah, she used to chew food and give it to me because I was a baby yet, at the time. And after she smoked her Durham or her corn cob pipe. . . .

(Laughter)

NP: It would have a tobacco taste.

MK: Guess so. I don't know. Maybe that's why I'm short. The caffeine. And I remember down at the Hōnaunau place we had tobacco growing.

NP: Oh my goodness.

MK: So maybe my mother did smoke, I don't remember too well. But I know we had tobacco growing there, and they used the leaf to make tobacco. I remember them rolling, now that you say that. I remember them rolling with the tobacco, you know, rolling it up.

NP: Well, back then nobody thought anything of it being bad, did they?

MK: I don't think so.

NP: They didn't realize there were effects or connection with cancer or anything.



MK: Oh yes. I don't think so. Never heard about that.

NP: It's probably a good way of relaxing.

MK: Probably. But like I say, mothers know best, and I felt that my mother knew best. And she really directed me in the right way. I'm really thankful to her. She always said to me that she didn't want me to work for anybody because she never worked for anybody, and she just worked for herself. She wanted me to be a boss of my own. So that's the reason she didn't want me to go out to work for anybody. She wanted me to have a business of my own. So she decided that I could do hair work. And I'm really thankful to her because I just love my work! All my classmates said they can't believe I became a hairdresser because I was really into the business field. I went to school and I was in the business field. That's what I wanted to do. But I ended up as a hairdresser. I work all alone, so I don't make that much, but I think I really . . .

NP: You always worked all alone, too?

MK: Yes. And I'm really thankful because I had a very good clientele. If I want to, I can work more, but I don't. Too old to work too much. (Chuckles)

NP: How often---do you work every day, usually?

MK: I used to work every day, except Sunday and Monday was always my day off. But now I only work like four days a week. I work Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. Actually, I work less since my son's divorce. I had to help him with the children, so I just worked less hours so that I can help him when he went to work.

NP: So you work part of the day Tuesday through Friday? Or. . . .

MK: Yes, I work Tuesday through Friday. And then I don't work Saturday, Sunday and Monday. And then I don't work too late because of the children. Because he goes to work at four [o'clock] so I watch them after that.

NP: But how nice to be able to do something that you love, and not have to say, "Well, I have to give it up because of my grandchildren or my husband, or because I think I'm getting too old." (MK chuckles.) That's really neat. It does---that's what keeps you young.

MK: Yeah, I think so. Working and the children.

NP: Well, I really appreciate all the time that you've given me, because I know from all our conversations how busy you really are, and it really means a lot to have been able to get some of the story of the Akana Store. I really enjoyed this, and thank you very much.

MK: Well, I hope I was able to give you enough. I can't remember so many things. (Chuckles)

NP: It's okay, we're all like that. So thank you.

MK: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **Kona Heritage Stores Oral History Project**

**Center for Oral History  
Social Science Research Institute  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa**

**August 2006**